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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a community service program in Singapore that involves voluntary mentoring, focusing on its impact upon adolescent girls. The paper highlights some of the ways in which community service providers come together to exchange ideas and practices to build up the social and emotional capacities of adolescent girls. After discussing issues related to female adolescent development, the tendency toward decline in self-esteem and academic achievement as they enter adolescence, and the need for resilience to keep them functioning when confronted with low self-esteem, the paper focuses on Singapore's volunteer mentoring program for adolescent girls. The program involves mentors who are over the age of 16 years who work with girls in upper elementary and lower secondary school. Set up by the Singapore government, the program involves 22 members representing various relevant government ministries, statutory boards, and major youth organizations. The paper provides examples of different mentoring programs in Singapore and discusses research on the mentoring experience. It concludes by explaining that the mentoring program benefits both mentees and mentors, noting problems within the program, and describing training workshops for female mentors. (SM)

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ENHANCING THE RESILIENCE OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS THROUGH THE MENTORING PROGRAMME

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Workshop: Enhancing the resilience of adolescent girls through the mentoring program.

This workshop describes a community service scheme in Singapore - voluntary mentoring - which is being evaluated for its successful and meaningful impact on our adolescent girls. It highlights some of the ways in which community service providers come together to exchange ideas and practices to build up the social and emotional capacities of the adolescent girl. In particular, the mentoring/tutoring scheme of a university's student volunteer group will be highlighted.

General goals of the workshop:

1 To stress the importance of joint effort and coordination among key governmental agencies to work together to help youths develop their vision for the future.
2 To exchange ideas on how schools, self-help groups and voluntary welfare organisations in Singapore have carried out successful mentoring schemes.
3 To provide opportunity to share Singapore's experiences on the role of volunteer woman mentors at work to serve the needs of our adolescent girls.
4 To foster greater understanding and tolerance between young girls of different cultures.

Specific aim of the workshop:

To illustrate the initial success of applying mediational skills in the mentoring programme for adolescent girls .

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ENHANCING THE RESILIENCE OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS THROUGH THE MENTORING PROGRAM

Adolescence is a stage of development between childhood and adulthood when the adolescent girl experiences a wide range of complex physical, personal and social changes. Biologically, she is going through an upsurge of instinctual forces during puberty and these have led her to occasional regression, ambivalence and non-conformity. Socially, adolescent girls are in a period of role transition and role conflict. They are exposed to a variety of conflicting agents of socialisation such as parents, school teachers and administrators, peers and the mass media pulling them in different directions. Today's changing social conditions have been putting on a great deal of increasing pressure on these girls.

Results of a recent study in Singapore suggest that for adolescent girls , the age span between 11 and 22 can be a time of significant decline in resilience and an increase in alienation (Mau, 1997). A way to develop resilience in adolescents is to understand what alienates them in and from schools. . By examining factors of alienation, specific protective factors and resilience enhancers can be developed. According to Mau, the fundamental power of this understanding is to foster resiliency by providing viable craft knowledge and common sense strategies. Many teachers and youth workers have endorsed the protective-factor research and resiliency approach as being extremely helpful in dealing with adolescent girls who cannot be removed from risk situations which they found themselves in.

In 1991 the American Association of University Women (AAUW) found in their research study that there is a decline in self-esteem and academic achievement among girls as they enter adolescence . Reasons for the decline are not clearly indicated but it is likely that multiple factors are involved. The AAUW study revealed that boys receive preferential treatment in school from teachers. The researchers found that boys ask more questions, are given more detailed and constructive criticism of their work, and are treated more tolerantly than girls during outbursts of temper or resistance.

Other educators also report a general drop in school performance among girls as they reach adolescence. (Orenstein, 1994). As a group, girls exhibit a general decline in science achievement not observed for boys, and this gender gap may be increasing. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results indicate that for 9 and 13 year olds, gender differences in science achievement increased between 1978 and 1986, with females academic performance declining . The analysis of the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development supports the finding that many girls seem to think well of themselves in the primary grades but suffer a severe decline in self confidence and

acceptance of body image by the age of 12. (Orenstein, 1994). The relationship between a decline in self concept and a decline in achievement indicates that identifying the resilience levels of female students at school and at home should be a high priority for parents and teachers.

Out-of-school factors probably also play a role. Rothenberg (1995) suggests that, as they grow older, girls' observations of women's roles in society contribute to their changing opinions about what is expected of girls. If girls observe that women hold positions of less status than men in society, it may lead girls to infer that their role is less important than that of boys or that they are inferior to boys. Another factor relates to cultural differences in sex role socialization, which are greater in some cultures than others. Parents' actions play a central role in girls' sex role socialization, and parents' choices and attitudes about toys, clothing, activities and playmates can shape a girl's sense of herself. It appears that ethnicity, race and class are differentiating factors in girls' interpretation of in-class and out-of-school experiences.

Adolescent girls need resilience to keep them functioning when they are confronted with low self-esteem and self-concept and to help them confront with adversities and life's challenges. An array of factors have been identified as having important roles in developing resilience in adolescents. Often echoed by other researchers, Werner (1989) clustered protective factors into the following major categories:

1) dispositional attributes of the adolescent girl
2) her affectional ties within the family
3) existence of external support systems which arise at school or within the community.

Resilience for adolescents can be described as a dynamic and ever changing quality, a tendency to rebound from stressful circumstances to resume usual activity and an ability to take action to overcome adversity. Resilience can be nurtured throughout one's development by strengthening protective processes at critical moments of life. (Winfield, 1997).. According to Mau (1997) there are a number of practical resilience enhancers which can be developed over a period of time with a mentor. These are the development of social skills, cognitive skills, a sense of responsibility, coping skills , perseverance, a meaning in life and an attitude of industriousness.

Development of cognitive skills

Adolescents feel they are successful in at least one activity whether in participating in sports, doing art, playing music, or pursuing a hobby. Being successful means being recognised and/or praised for one's interest or performance. They learn implicitly to pursue and develop their own natural aptitudes and interests.

Development of social skills

Adolescents are at the stage of other-orientation when they focus beyond themselves. Peers become very important in their lives and they seek to be well-liked by their peers. They can enhance their resilience when they know how to communicate with others and solicit help and support.

Development of a sense of responsibility

Adolescents need to learn to have a take-charge attitude in good and bad times. They must be given opportunities to be responsible so they can build their personal confidence. Build their internal locus of control.

Development of coping skills

Adolescents need to learn to effectively manage stress. They need to know the difference between emotion-focused which deals with feelings arising from a problem, and problem-focused which deals with the problem.

Development of perseverance

Adolescents need to have personal goals which become motivators for action. By persevering they can contemplate different ways to meet an objective. In fact, perseverance is the key to attainment of goals.

Development of a meaning in life

Adolescents need a meaningful philosophy to live by, given the rapid changes all around them. They learn to transcend a difficult immediate situation by focusing on the long term goal. They learn to be committed to a religion, family, community and/or nation.

Development of an attitude of excellence.

Adolescents learn to believe in the idea of "I will do my best". They develop the habit of working hard, pushing beyond what is expected; something needed in time of crisis.

A number of successful programmes worldwide have been developed to build up the resilience of the adolescent girls. These projects vary in their emphases and structures depending on the individual needs of the country. The following is a brief description of a pilot project planned and implemented in Singapore. The mentoring programme is a community service scheme which has quite a successful and meaningful impact on our adolescent girls

MENTORING PROGRAMME FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Mentoring in Singapore is a relatively new concept especially voluntary mentoring. Basically, mentoring is a two-way relationship of friendship, trust and mutual respect between a more mature person and a younger person. The idea is for the mentor to sacrificially help the mentee and in the process develop bonds of friendship. The context where voluntary mentoring takes place is in the schools but not embedded in any

academic-based programmes. There are lots of informal chat, fun-filled activities and spontaneous and mutual sharing of ideas .

The mentors are usually youths above 16, tertiary educated and willing to help. The mentees are upper primary and lower secondary school children who stand to benefit from encouraging words and attention from a big brother/sister. Usually, there is a one-hour informal tuition or homework supervision before the fun time and on the average, a volunteer mentor will commit 100 hours of mentoring spread weekly over six months to a year.

In Singapore, the mentoring volunteer scheme was launched in August 1995 by the National Youth Council (NYC) and British Petroleum (BP). The NYC was set up by the Singapore Government in 1989 as the national coordinating body for youth affairs. It consists of 22 members representing various relevant government ministries, statutory boards and major youth organisations. The NYC's mission is to help create opportunities for youth to maximise their potential and enhance their commitment to Singapore and their contributions to society. It works in partnership with youth groups, educational institutions, civic and voluntary organisations, public and private sector agencies with a focus on the needs and development of youth.

BP is the first company to implement such a scheme in Asia and its impact on our youth is impressive. The two universities – National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University and four polytechnics have provided mentors to 81 schools and six community clubs, all working together for the benefit of more than 2500 disadvantaged youths – including the alienated adolescent girls.

At the Nanyang Technological University, the mentoring and tutoring scheme is run by the students' union. The objectives are to help under-privileged primary and secondary students by providing effective tutoring and mentoring services, free of charge. It extends the benefits of the scheme to all under-privileged students in Singapore and to provide undergraduates with the opportunity to be involved in social work and to benefit from it.

The mentoring and tutoring sessions are conducted mostly on a one-to-one basis. Mentors devote at least one and half hour every week to conduct the sessions within the premises of the school. The first sessions started in Jan 1996. A total of 213 NTU undergraduates were sent to 23 primary and secondary schools in Singapore to perform their role as "mentors". 273 under-privileged children have been identified by their schools and they have since benefitted from the guidance of their respective mentors.

The NTUSU_BP mentoring and tutoring scheme is now running into its third year, providing free weekly tuition to selected primary and secondary school students. Students are selected by their schools based on the following criteria: their family lives in a three-room flat, and its total monthly income is less than $1200. Children from single parent families or children whose parents are both working for most of the day may be accepted

too. Each selected student is then paired up with an NTU undergraduate, who will tutor the student and act as a "big brother" or "big sister".

In March 1998 a survey was initiated on the mentoring scheme focussing on the relationship between the adolescent girls (mentors) in the university and the adolescent girls (mentees) in the schools. The aim is to identify the important factors that may contribute maximally to enhance the resilience of the adolescent girl mentees in the scheme.

Out of a total of 200 mentors , the initial statistics are:

Age groups	Below 19	58%
	20 – 24	34%
	Above 25	8%

Sex	Males	37%
	Females	63%

University Course	Business	27%
	Accountancy	24%
	Engineering	27%
	Communication Studies	3%
	Computer Studies	7%
	English Studies	4%
	Others	8%

Year of Study	First	58%
	Second	27%
	Third	15%

Number of mentees with them	1 = 37%
	2= 54%
	3= 9%

From the female mentors, a small sample was interviewed regarding their experiences with the "at risk" adolescent girls in their charge. It was observed that 63% of the total number of 200 mentors are girls. They had committed themselves to helping needy girls , not only through teaching them but also by being a friend to them. One first year female engineering student had been giving private tuition in the past, but she chose to become a

mentor when she came to the university. "It is really more meaningful as you are spending time with girls who really appreciate what you are doing".

The people who are benefiting from this scheme are not only the girls but their teachers in school as well... Besides having someone around to help them with their homework, the students also have a wiser and older friend to talk to, especially when they encountered personal problems. The girls are now more willing to open up and respond in class. Outings are sometimes organised to give the mentors and mentees additional time to mingle and interact.

The programmes however have not all been smooth sailing. From the survey responses, it was found that many girl mentors faced difficulties in interacting with their mentees. It was not easy to win the trust and cooperation of the girls especially from very sheltered homes or from broken families. Apparently, the main problems with the adolescent girl mentees are related to their poor self concept and academic achievement. It was reported that they were easily distracted in their work (21% of overall list of problems) poor attitude (24%) very slow (28%) and poor communication (7%)

In March 1998 a small training workshop for female mentors was conducted in the university to help them interact successfully with their girl mentees in their tutoring. The workshop was based on a set of mediational skills developed by Feuerstein. The role of the mentor as a mediator in the interactive exchange between mentor and mentee is critical in the development of resilience of the mentee. In this mediational approach , Feuerstein and his colleagues (1980, 1991) refer to the unique interactions by which more matured adults intentionally interpose themselves between the student/mentee/learner and an external stimulus.

The principles of mediational skills are based on the theory of structural cognitive modifiability and the theory of mediated learning experience. This strategy is a new and different way of conceptualising how social and cognitive skills can be taught and the approach has been widely researched, criticised and acclaimed in educational circles.
Feuerstein maintains that many problems in growing up and coping with life are the result of insufficient or inadequate mediation from adults or peers. He has developed a programme, Instrumental Enrichment, to provide mediational teaching in a systematic way in the classroom. The general goal of the programme is to teach adolescents prerequisites of thinking and learning so that they will learn how to learn and be able to adapt and adjust to everchanging life conditions. It is assumed that cognitive processing can be substantially modified through effective intervention and this changes the expected course and outcome of development.

The female mentors in the university were given ten mediational skills in the workshop. These are described by Feuerstein as ten criteria for an interaction to be considered mediational and instructive in nature. The first three criteria : intentionality, transcendence and meaningfulness are always present, while a fourth and fifth – regulation of behaviour and mediation of competence are often present. However,

mediation is a dynamic and open process and should not be rigidly applied nor seen to be fixed at ten criteria. The following are the ten criteria:

Intentionality and reciprocity	Sharing behaviour
Meaning	Individuation
Transcendence	Goal Planning
Competence	Challenge
Self-regulation and control of behaviour	Self change

After the training workshop, the mentors were encouraged to implement the mediational strategy in all their interactions (including tutoring) with their girl mentees. They were asked to keep anecdotal records of all their encounters. Despite the very short training period, sufficient awareness has been created. Based on interviews and observations, the results appear very promising. The mentors' reactions to the workshop have been very positive and they requested for a series of followup workshops to take place.

This short paper is not intended to be an evaluation of the mentoring programme as it exists now. The programme has a good start and is still going on . Some of the female mentors will tend to be more successful than others and there is a need for a longer period of training for any strong effects of mediation to work well in the girls. However, there is some basis for certain attitudinal changes occuring in the adolescent girls and a promising start has been made to build up their resilence to cope with their growing up in a stressful society.